

Commonly Asked Questions about Sun Safety

Q What is Don't Fry Day?

A The National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention has designated the Friday before Memorial Day (this year May 27) "Don't Fry Day" to raise awareness about sun safety. EPA is a major participant in the Council through its SunWise program. Many families view Memorial Day weekend as the start of the summer season and begin spending countless hours outside, without appropriate sun protection against UV rays. Taking a few, easy precautions can help children and adults significantly reduce their chances of getting skin cancer and cataracts.

Q What is the desirable level of SPF to protect from overexposure to the sun?

A In general, it is best to look for a product that has an SPF of at least 15. You should be aware that an SPF of 30 is not twice as protective as an SPF of 15; rather, when properly used, an SPF of 15 protects the skin from 93 percent of UVB radiation, and an SPF of 30 provides 97 percent protection.

Q When and where should sunscreen be applied?

A Sunscreen should be applied to all exposed skin 20 minutes before going outside. If you forgot to put it on 20 minutes beforehand, you can still put it on when you get to your destination. Don't forget the ears which make up many of the more serious squamous cell cancers, the back which comprises about a third of all melanomas in men and 20% in women, and the legs that make up about 20-25% of all melanomas in women.

Q How much and how often does sunscreen need to be reapplied?

A About one ounce to cover all exposed skin (think of a shot glass filled with sunscreen). Reapply every two hours, even on cloudy days, and more often when swimming, sweating or toweling off.

Q At what age should a child start wearing sunscreen?

A The American Cancer Society recommends that sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15 be applied to children six months and older. While children younger than six months are not advised to wear sunscreen, children of all ages should use hats and sun-protective clothing such as long-sleeved shirts and wide-brimmed hats.¹ The American Academy of

¹ American Cancer Society. Skin Cancer Prevention and Early Detection: How do I protect myself from UV rays? Retrieved August 6, 2010 from <http://www.cancer.org/Cancer/CancerCauses/SunandUVExposure/SkinCancerPreventionandEarlyDetection/skin-cancer-prevention-and-early-detection-u-v-protection>.

Pediatrics recommends using sunscreen on infants for small areas such as the face and back of hands where protection from clothing is inadequate.²

Q Am I still at risk for skin cancer if I have darker skin and don't easily burn?

A Everyone's skin and eyes can be damaged by the sun. While people with darker skin have a lower chance of developing skin cancer because of higher melanin content in their skin, they are still susceptible to skin cancer.³ Additionally, every person in every ethnic group is susceptible to eye damage, premature wrinkling, and weakening of the immune system.

Q Is tanning OK for your skin if you don't get burned?

A Any change to your natural skin color is a sign of damage. UV radiation from both tanning beds and the sun causes skin cancer and wrinkling – even if you don't burn! People who use tanning beds before age 30 increase their chances of developing melanoma by 75 percent. UV radiation is a proven human carcinogen, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the World Health Organization.

Q Are there options available to tan safely without overexposure to UV?

A Sunless tanners and bronzers are available commercially. They are applied to the skin like a cream and can provide a temporary, artificial tan. The only color additive currently approved by FDA for this purpose is dihydroxyacetone (DHA).

Bronzers stain the skin temporarily, and they can generally be removed with soap and water. They may streak after application and can stain clothes. Sunless tanners and bronzers might not contain active sunscreen ingredients. Be sure to read their labels to find out if they provide any or enough sun protection.

If you choose to get a spray tan, make sure not to inhale any of the spray.

Q Is sunscreen the only way to protect my skin from too much sun?

A No; sunscreen is just one way to protect your skin from overexposure to UV radiation. One easy way to remember sun safety behaviors is: Slip, Slop, Slap and Wrap.

- Slip on a shirt, preferably long-sleeved, or with built-in UV protection
 - Slop on sunscreen generously, SPF 15 or higher
 - Slap on a wide-brimmed hat and
 - Wrap on sunglasses to protect your eyes from cataracts and other eye damage.
- You can also seek shade between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when UV radiation levels are at their highest. Check the UV Index to plan your day accordingly: www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvindex.html.

² American Academy of Pediatrics. Summer Safety Tips – Part I. Retrieved August 9, 2010 from <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/summertips.cfm>.

³ American Cancer Society. Skin Cancer Prevention and Early Detection. Retrieved August 9, 2010 from <http://www.cancer.org/Cancer/CancerCauses/SunandUVExposure/SkinCancerPreventionandEarlyDetection/skin-cancer-prevention-and-early-detection-sun-damage>.

Q Will Sun Protection Deprive Me of Vitamin D?

A Most people get an adequate amount of vitamin D in their diets. If you are concerned about not getting enough vitamin D, consult your physician and consider taking a multivitamin supplement and consuming more foods and beverages fortified with vitamin D daily. Fortunately, people who choose to protect their skin from the sun can easily acquire a sufficient amount of vitamin D by mouth (from a combination of diet and vitamin supplements), thus providing an alternative route to maintaining a healthy vitamin D concentration that avoids the risk associated with sun exposure.

EPA's SunWise program is a national environmental and health education program that teaches children and their caregivers how to be safe in the sun through the use of classroom-, school-, and community-based components. To learn more about free SunWise resources, including a sun safety packing list, or to download the UV Index widget or smart phone application, visit www.epa.gov/sunwise.